



ARBORLAND MONTESSORI INFANT - 8TH GRADE PRIVATE SCHOOLS

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"Teachers must have the greatest respect for the young personality, realizing that in the soul of the adolescent, great values are hidden... If social progress is realized through the succession of the generations, then these children, as they grow up, will become more highly developed than their adult teachers"

Maria Montessori (From *Childhood to Adolescence*, p. 69)

Hello Junior High Families,

We hope this letter finds you well and as excited as we are to begin a new school year. You have chosen Arborland Montessori for your junior high journey and while strong academics are a given in our program, our students graduate with so much more.

Adolescence is a time of tremendous growth and transformation, both physically and emotionally. It is a time for our students to discover their voices, shape their identities, and explore the world around them with the eyes of emerging adulthood. Our role as educators and guides is to support students and families throughout this process by providing an environment that fosters curiosity, creativity, independence, and self-discovery.

Throughout the year, students will engage in a variety of activities, group projects, electives, and collaborative learning experiences both in the classroom and in the broader community. This program is designed not only to deepen their understanding of core subjects but also to strengthen critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills. In this letter, we will outline our daily schedule, program components, communication expectations, and our conference format. Please note that many program details will continue to evolve, shaped by the students themselves. Here is an overview of our core program:

Daily Schedule

Our school day runs from 8:00 AM to 3:45 PM and is divided into seven periods. Students will attend classes in Language Arts, Math, Science, Social Science, Physical Education, Foreign Language, and Elective. Each day includes a morning nutrition break and a 30-minute lunch break. Additionally, we will dedicate time for class planning and events. We hope to reserve Friday afternoons for our Service Learning curriculum, though this will be finalized as our weekly and daily schedule solidifies.

7th Grade Service Learning Pathways

Dr. Maria Montessori believed adolescence is a time for young people to discover their purpose by making meaningful contributions to their community. Through Service Learning Pathways, students move beyond the classroom to develop leadership, compassion, responsibility, and real-world problem-solving skills tailored to their areas of interest.

Our students in both 7th and 8th grade will choose from a selection of Service Pathways during Orientation. These pathways will allow the students to provide a service to our school and community while completing long-term projects with set goals. Students will be responsible for setting goals, planning projects, making and arranging deadlines and plans, and budgeting any costs involved. To facilitate these Pathways students will dedicate one afternoon a week to service learning and work on their chosen projects.

Potential Service Pathways include: running a recycling program and managing environmental beautification campaigns in and outside of Arborland, leading monthly advocacy and awareness campaigns, mentoring younger students in reading or STEM projects, designing and producing school newsletters, podcasts, and the yearbook, or seeking out other volunteer opportunities within our community network. We also welcome students to bring ideas and share them with the class. If you have suggestions for service projects, please encourage your child to pass them along to us.

8th Grade Service Learning and Mentorships

In the fall semester, 8th grade students take on leadership opportunities and mentor 7th grade students in Service Learning Pathways. This collaborative approach helps build community while allowing older students to take on active leadership roles. In the spring, 8th grade students will transition to an individual Mentorship Pathway that allows them explore potential career paths as we help the students find their purpose. More details about the mentorship program will be provided during Orientation Week.

Grading

Students will take an active role in managing their academic progress. Grades will be tracked using Jupiter, which both students and parents can access throughout the semester. Grades reset each quarter, and formal reports, including attendance and citizenship, will be issued. We encourage students to take ownership of their learning and communicate openly with teachers and family members regarding their academic standing.

Communication

All students are expected to have a Gmail account and to check and respond to emails regularly. We recommend a professional format such as firstnamelastname@gmail.com. This becomes increasingly important as students move through the program and begin preparing for internships and other real-world responsibilities. Email is the best way to contact subject teachers. Phones are not permitted during school hours and must be turned off and put away unless students are off-campus.

We believe that regular, open communication between teachers, parents, and students is essential to a successful educational experience. Please do not hesitate to reach out to the teaching staff with any questions, concerns, or suggestions. For the fastest response, feel free to email mssimms@arborland.com or mrsmith@arborland.com. If the matter is urgent, you may also contact the main office, and they will relay a message to us promptly.

Appropriate Use of Technology

Each year, students collaborate on a Class Constitution and a Technology User Agreement. During Orientation Week, we will explore appropriate technology use and the principles of good digital citizenship. While the internet is a powerful educational tool, it can also be a source of distraction. We will focus on responsible internet use, research skills, online privacy, intellectual property rights, and the importance of

avoiding plagiarism. Our goal is to create a supportive and inclusive digital environment where everyone feels respected and safe. Orientation Week will also include the creation of a class-specific Technology Agreement tailored to our unique learning needs.

Academic Conferences

Students are expected to attend conferences alongside their parents and will take an active role in reviewing their academic progress. When conference sign-ups become available, please select a time that allows all parties to be present.

Classroom Hours

The classroom will be staffed by a teacher from 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM daily. After 4:00 PM, students may remain on campus and use the classroom until 6:00 PM. During this time, an office staff member will be present in the lobby to assist with any needs. Students are encouraged to use this time productively to complete assignments or collaborate with peers. This opportunity is a privilege and a responsibility, and students are expected to maintain respectful and appropriate behavior. Continued access to after-school classroom time will depend on their ability to demonstrate responsible citizenship.

Teacher Introductions

Ms. Ashley Simms

Hello, my name is Ashley Simms, and I have had the joy of teaching at Arborland Montessori for the past 21 years. I began my journey in the Upper Elementary program, and throughout the years, my passion for working with upper elementary and adolescent students has continued to grow. It has been a true privilege to be part of founding our junior high program, and I am incredibly proud of all that we have created together. I am also excited about the continued opportunities our program provides to support, encourage, and inspire our students as they grow.

I grew up here in Orange County and graduated from Esperanza High School before attending Baylor University in Texas, where I earned my bachelor's degree in Social Work. After returning home from college, I spent several years developing youth sports and aquatics programs for the YMCA of Orange County. During that time, I discovered a deep love for teaching, mentoring, and building meaningful connections with young people.

With a desire to pursue a career in education, I enrolled in the University of Phoenix's Master of Education and Teaching Credential program, where I earned my MAEd in Secondary Education along with my California teaching credential in English. After my first year at Arborland, I was fortunate to complete my Montessori Upper Elementary certification, which opened the door to a deeper understanding and appreciation of Montessori philosophy. Since then, I have also completed Montessori Adolescent Orientation training and look forward to continuing my Montessori learning journey.

Outside of the classroom, I enjoy cooking, reading, and traveling, and I love finding ways to weave these interests into the learning experiences I create for my students. I am deeply committed to helping each student grow academically, socially, and emotionally during this important stage of their

lives. I am truly looking forward to partnering with our students and families this year and beginning a meaningful, joyful journey of learning together.

Mr. Ryan Smith

Hello all, I'm Ryan Smith and this will be my 4th year teaching at Arborland Montessori Junior High. I started at Arborland in 2023 after moving to the United States and becoming a resident. I believe that Junior High school is one of the most important moments in one's educational journey. It is a transitory period where students are discovering who they are, and what their relationship with education will be. I am thrilled to be a part of a program that fosters all forms of learning and helps students grow both academically and personally. I grew up in the United Kingdom and despite a rocky start in my own education, I eventually excelled and finished High School strong. Upon leaving school, I completed a GNVQ in Children's Care, Learning, and Development, which required both academic study and in setting training. I then started at the very same primary school that I had attended and began working in classrooms at the age of 17. After finishing my qualification, I completed a bachelor's degree in English Literature remotely with the Open University, which allowed me to continue to work with students full-time. Then in 2018, after finishing my degree and working in my local school for 8 years, I moved to Japan where I taught English at public Junior High and Cram Schools. After living out there for 4 years and meeting my now wife, I moved to Orange County. I write stories in my spare time and lead Dungeons and Dragons games. I play both board games and video games and thus I make sure to use games in my teaching. This year marks my 15th year as a teacher and I am excited to continue working with students to help them learn and grow into their best selves.

Supply List

- Student Planner (for Homework Log) - 5.5"x8.5" or 8.5"x11" (no smaller, please)
- Personal Technology Device
- Accordion folder (with at least 5 sections)
- ELA
 - 1 - 8.5"x11", 5 Subject notebook (college-ruled)
 - Curriculum novels will need to be purchased throughout the year
- Math
 - 2 in or 2 ½ in, 3-ring binder
 - Supply of graph paper (two to four packages to start, this will be used for class work and will need to be refilled and supplied by the students)
 - Inch/centimeter ruler
 - Protractor
 - Safety Compass (required for Geometry students)
 - Scientific Calculator, no graphing calculators please
 - TI30XIIS or TI-30Xa preferred
- Elective
 - 1 - 8.5"x 11" spiral notebook (college-ruled)
 - May need additional supplies
- Spanish
 - 1 - 8.5"x 11" spiral notebook (college-ruled)
 - Index cards

- Two packages of lined paper (college-ruled)
- A packet of 3M Post-its Index Flat Tabs 51/38mm
- Flag tabs (multiple packages)
- Pencils (regular or mechanical are fine) – please provide the lead for mechanical pencils
- Pens (colored, not neon or metallic for classwork and corrections)
- Erasers
- Highlighters
- Index cards
- Scissors (not child-size scissors)
- Markers (no crayons necessary)
- Sharpies – Black thin and Black regular (may bring metallic Sharpies)
- Milk crate for storage

The beginning of a new school year is always filled with new possibilities and chances to grow for both students and teachers. As students settle into 7th grade or as 8th-grade leaders, it is our program's mission to adapt and develop alongside their needs. We want our students to feel in control and respected in their education, and we will work with them to develop study skills that suit them, as well as adapt our classes to match their needs. We look forward to setting off on this journey of learning and development as we grow with wonder and lead with purpose to become mature learners and important members of our community.

Our dedicated team is committed to fostering a safe, inclusive, and caring environment where every student feels seen, respected, and valued. We will celebrate their successes, encourage their strengths, and be there to guide them through challenges with compassion and understanding.

Here's to a year of discovery, connection, and meaningful growth. We are truly honored to be part of this journey with you.

Warmly,

Ashley Simms
Junior High Teacher
Arborland Montessori Children's Academy

Ryan Smith
Junior High Teacher